



OFFICE OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Washington State
Conservation Commission

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**Farmland Preservation Task Force Meeting Minutes
Cherberg Building, Olympia, Washington
Conference Rooms A, B, & C
December 5, 2007**

FINAL MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Farmland Preservation Task Force met for the first time on December 5, 2007, at the John A. Cherberg Building in Conference Rooms A, B & C in Olympia, Washington. Office of Farmland Preservation Manager Steve McGonigal called meeting to order at 9:07AM.

ATTENDEES:

Task Force Members:

Bob Hart, Farmer Representative, NW Region
John Mankowski, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Lynn Bahrych, Conservation Commission
Lee Faulconer, WA State Dept. of Agriculture
Jeff Emtman, Farmer Representative, NE Region
Sheryl Cox, Farmer Representative, SE Washington
Greg Schoenbachler, Farmer Representative, SW Region
Gus Highbanks, NRCS State Conservationist
Dee Caputo, WA State Dept. of Community, Trade and Economic Development
Rudy Plager, Adams County Commissioner
Don Munks, Skagit County Commissioner
Fred Colvin, WA Association of Conservation Districts
Representative Steve Hailey, Mesa, WA
Representative Larry Springer, Kirkland, WA
Steve McGonigal, Manager, Office of Farmland Preservation

Via Phone:

Jacob Anderson, Farmer Representative, So. Central Region

Guests:

Valoria Loveland, Director of Department of Agriculture
Bill Boyum, Chair, WA State Conservation Commission (WSCC)
Mark Clark, Executive Director of WA State Conservation Commission
Janet Haag, Legislative Assistant for Senator Jim Honeyford
Nova Gattman, Legislative Assistant for Senator Mary Margaret Haugen

Commission Staff:

Ron Shultz, Special Assistant to the Executive Director
Mary Anderson, Executive Assistant
Lori Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant
Tom Salzer
Susie Vanderburg
Stu Trefry

Self-Introductions of Members:

Task Force members introduced themselves and described their interest in preserving farmland. Written statements were presented from Senator Jim Honeyford and Richard Thomason, members who could not attend. Members Jacob Anderson and Senator Mary Margaret Haugen were also unable to attend.

Announcements and Presentations:

John Mankowski presented certificate of SB 5108. Chair Bill Boyum accepted on behalf of WSCC.

WSCC Chair Bill Boyum spoke to Task Force on bringing bill forward and commended Task Force for work that is ahead of them. He reassured Task Force that they are in good hands and have full support of the Conservation Commission.

Mark Clark, Executive Director of WSCC, also spoke to Task Force. Mark introduced Mary Anderson, Tom Salzer and Ron Shultz as they will be assisting Steve McGonigal through this process. Susie Vanderburg is WSCC's Communication and Outreach Specialist and Stu Trefry is Regional Manager. Mark said that staff and Task Force members will be taking tours of each region of the state to talk to various landowners to get their input. We will get the best overview of what is going on in each of these counties and will put together a package on the synopsis of the counties. It will take about a year to complete this.

Director of Agriculture, Valoria Loveland - Spoke of the diversity in different states. Loveland pointed out the map of Farming on the Edge (see attachment) and how it shows a great example of our best land being under a lot of pressure. She urged "No net loss of farmland." She spoke of Japan, where they can no longer feed their own people. WA State should never be put in the position that we cannot feed our own people. We need to put emphasis on food production and food safety. Need to come up with ideas on how we can preserve our farmlands and figure out how we do not lose another inch of farmland in our state. "It's a hard task, good luck and work hard!"

FARMING ON THE
EDGE DOCS..pdf

AGENDA

Steve suggested to moving "Staff Report" to end of agenda. He also suggested moving "Election of Chair" after "Powers & Duties" so Jacob Anderson can be present via phone. Task Force agreed to changes.

POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE OFFICE OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION

OFP Powers & Duties
TF Dec 5.ppt

There was a PowerPoint presentation and discussion of the "Powers and Duties" of the Office of Farmland Preservation," as defined in the authorizing legislation.

- **AGRICULTURAL EASEMENTS** - The first two bullets concerned the existing Agricultural Easement Program. The second bullet calls for a recommendation from the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP), with the advice of the Task Force, concerning funding for that account. Steve explained that if funding was going to be recommended for the next biennium, technical documents would have to be produced between May and August of 2008. Therefore, he called the development of such funding recommendations "the shortest time-line" facing the OFP and the Task Force. During discussion, Rudy Plager stated "we haven't even determined that agricultural easements are the way to go." Various views on the value of such programs, and the desirability of recommending funding such activities in the next biennium, were discussed. Bob Hart said that sometimes the most difficult step is to get a new line-item in the budget, and then it can be adjusted later.
- **FACTORS LEADING TO LOSS OF FARMLAND** – McGonigal noted that the factors listed in the bill do not include regulatory matters. Sheryl Cox and Greg Schoenbachler mentioned estate taxes. John Mankowski saw this task as the most important one. Water availability and price were mentioned. Rudy Plager asked for information about state spending for economic development. He questioned whether such spending is contributing to loss of farmland.
- **MODEL PROGRAMS** – This item in the bill was described.
- **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO LOCALITIES** – It was noted that assistance is currently being provided to eight counties, and that project would be discussed later in the presentation. It was agreed that the Task Force would have much deeper discussions of these powers and duties at future meetings, and may create part of the next meeting's agenda today. Dee Caputo said that Heather Balash of CTED should be an invited speaker on the subject of Transfer of Development rights.
- **OWNERSHIP TRANSITION** – It was stated that there are good programs that are not widely known. We might do well to help existing program(s), instead of re-inventing the wheel.
- **CLEARINGHOUSE FOR INCENTIVE PROGRAMS** – This item in the bill was described.

The discussion of the Powers and Duties of the new office led to discussion of several related matters, listed below.

CURRENT ASSISTANCE TO COUNTIES

- The next several slides and discussion detailed the eight technical assistance grants that the OFP is currently providing to county governments. Larry Springer pointed out that many of those projects will provide information that will be useful to the Task Force. Reports produced at the end of the projects will be provided to the Task Force. Earlier partial reports will be provided, if available. Lynn Bahrych said that the San Juan County project would produce some useful information by the coming spring.

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LANDS

- Lynn said that the Trust for Public Land is helping communities determine what source of funding their citizens would prefer for farmland preservation, then using that information to secure matching federal funds. They are available to speak to the Task Force.

OPERATIONS

- Don Munks asked what counties around the state are doing. Mark Clark said that a synopsis of the activity in the county/region could be compiled in conjunction with a Task Force meeting in that region.

John Mankowski noted that the bill is permissive. There are many things the OFP and Task Force “may” do, and few things they “shall” do.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

- Lee Faulconer asked what federal programs exist, and what matching funds they might have. Gus Hughbanks said it would be relatively easy to find out from NRCS, FSA, RC&D, etc. The information is not available at any central source.

MISSION/VISION STATEMENT

- There was agreement that this is not a regulatory program. Agreement that a mission statement should be established that really defines what the goals are of the Task Force. Lynn Bahrych noted that some regulations, like right-to-farm ordinances, help to preserve farmland. Task Force members will send their input for the mission/vision statement to Steve prior to the next meeting, and he will develop a small number of potential statements for consideration at the next meeting.

DISCUSSION OF FORMATION OF COMMITTEES

Jacob Anderson joined via phone link.

No committees or sub groups have been established as of yet. Task Force agreed that having a committee is a tool to get things done and we could create a charter. Before this can be done, Task Force needs to meet to understand what the focus is and the needs are.

QUESTIONNAIRE TO CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

There was agreement to ask the Conservation Commission to ask all 47 Conservation Districts why they think farmland is being lost in their areas, and have their responses by the next Task Force meeting.

Staff will supply Task Force members with information to help them attend Conservation District meetings in their areas during this process.

RELATED PROGRAMS AND ISSUES

John Mankowski suggested that the Task Force be informed of what other significant ag-related processes are going on. He mentioned the 5248 process, the Future of Farming Process, the Regional TDR Program. A brief presentation on each of these was suggested for a future meeting. Perhaps prior to that, a brief written synopsis of those programs, by staff, was suggested.

Mark Clark also suggested studying some other states and their programs. Also WSU, WDFW.

There was discussion of related issues, and questions about how involved the Task Force wants to get in immigration, water, WTO, etc..

Lynn Bahrych stressed understanding the true cost of development, and the increased demand for government services, versus the cost of maintaining farmland that pays more taxes than it consumes in services. She said that Don Stuart of American Farmland Trust is an expert on the subject.

ELECTION OF CHAIR

Bob Hart was unanimously elected chair of the Task Force.

Lunch break: 12-1:30

Meeting called back to order by Chairman Bob Hart at 1:35 PM

MEETING SCHEDULE 2008

*Guests: Janet Haag, Legislative Assistant for Senator Jim Honeyford
Nova Gattman, Legislative Assistant for Senator Mary Margaret Haugen*

Task Force agreed that the first Wednesday of every even numbered month is when Task Force will meet. The dates and target locations for meetings in 2008 will be:

February 6- South West Region
April 2- North West Region, possibly Skagit County
June 4- South East Region, possibly Walla Walla County
August 6- South Central Region, possibly Goldendale or Yakima
October 1- Spokane, North East
December 3- Wenatchee, N. Central

Efforts will be made to hold tours and/or interaction dinners in conjunction with meetings. Local cooperators will be necessary to put on tours. The afternoon before the meeting is the preferred time for a tour. The morning after the meeting is a second choice.

Gus Hughbanks and Dee Caputo noted they are unable to make the August 2008 meeting.

Representative Springer noted that due to session in February it will be hard for legislators to attend.

“FUTURE OF FARMING” PROJECT

Lee Faulconer reported.

Ag-WA No.1
Employer DOC...pdf

Handed out attached document and CD called: *Our Farms to Your Table*

Walked through the handout

Map helps break out the revenue of agriculture and food processing in counties in the state.

Trying to break down video to put on short TV segments.

Needs to finalize documents through the Director of Ag before handing out to the public.

Jennifer Harte- Economist at the Dept. of Agriculture will be a helpful resource.

Future Farming Project work needs to be done by 2009.

Ag 2000 is document they will be working on.

Will be talking to a lot of organizations and leaders doing focus groups to produce a strategic plan to present to the legislature to further agriculture in our state.

Between Ag and Task Force combined efforts will help us move forward.

Lee will have further detailed information on the project for the Task Force by next meeting.

Land use and trade barrier, WTO issues are very important to identify.

Ethanol and Bio fuel will eventually be looked at during this project.

The Future Farming project will be forming a steering committee. The committee will be appointed by the Director of Ag.

Not appointed by the Gov. like the Task Force group.
Number of members has not yet been determined. Director would like committee to be directed by a balanced group of people.

ESTABLISHMENT OF GROUND RULES

The Task Force reviewed a document that was adopted by CTED's TDR Policy Advisory Committee.

Task Force Members' Roles and Responsibilities: Every member should make every effort to make a TF meeting 6 times a year. There was agreement that alternates may attend, but may not vote. It appeared agreed that voting members may vote by conference call.

The Task Force will reach consensus when it can, and will vote when it cannot. In cases where there is not agreement, there may be a majority Task Force recommendation and a minority report.

Staff was asked to convert CTED's document, make it match what was heard today, and bring it back to the next meeting.

The Role of the Public in Committee Meetings: There will be an occasion for members of the public to speak to the Task Force. Bob Hart felt it was best at the end of the meeting, when attendees have heard the content of that day's events. There will also be an effort to have an event the night before for interaction.

A draft of the Proposed Ground Rules will be ready for the next TF meeting.

DAIRY INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

Jay Gordon, Executive Director of Dairy Federation, presented the Dairy Industry's perspective on farmland preservation. The industry's problems with the current floods were discussed.

He spoke of activities in other states, where farmers have come to accept the sale of development rights, something he has done on his multi-generation dairy. He cited cultural barriers to farmer acceptance here. He said that the farming areas of Fife, Sumner, Puyallup and Kent were lost to development. He pointed to Skagit, Northern Whatcom, and Ellensburg as agricultural ecosystems relatively intact. He recommended bringing in farmers who have been successful in farmland preservation from out of state to speak to farmers. Some well-respected families in WA have participated in such programs. Even farm organizations may not be able to discuss such programs with farmers as effectively as experienced farmers could. Bankers need to be involved in the decision, because titles are involved, so involve Farm Credit.

Concerning development rights, he said “leasing does us no good.” He cited the need for long-term assurances concerning neighbors, investments, etc. The Federation Board is consistent on this point. He said “this is going to take a lot of money.” Go to Pennsylvania and find out how they did it, he suggested.

He wished the Task Force success, and said “you’ve got a tough challenge here.”

CORRESPONDENCE

Task Force read incoming correspondence from Mr. Thorn of Dayton, WA Dated Dec. 4, 2007 regarding wind turbine power. Task Force agreed that an acknowledgment letter should be sent out to Mr. Thorn, thanking him for his comments. Original Correspondence will be kept on file. Task Force should not ignore this subject but put it in the hopper for future discussions. Short discussion how wind turbine power can be looked as not just development but also as a tool to achieve financial sustainability. Will be treated as input. Positions on issues will not be adopted at this time.

STAFF REPORT: ACTIVITIES TO DATE

Steve will e-mail task force members a report on staff activities to-date.

NEXT MEETING & POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS:

Dig into the real causes of farmland conversion, with feedback from CDs.
A Vision/Mission Statement
Presentation by Don Stuart of American Farmland Trust?
Discussion of definition of farmland/sustainable farmland
Combined data gathered from the CDs
Draft ground rule proposals

OPEN MICROPHONE

Bob Hart provided opportunity for public comment. There were no comments.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM by Chair Bob Hart.